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**WILLIAM DEAN HOWELLS**

and the

**HAYMARKET ERA**

by **SENDER GARLIN**

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William Dean Howells  
and the Haymarket Era

CONTENTS

Acknowledgments .....	ii
William Dean Howells and the Haymarket Era .....	1
A Personal Postscript .....	34
Appendix A: Facsimile of letter from Eleanor Marx to William Dean Howells .....	36
Appendix B: Facsimile of letter from August Spies, Michael Schwab, and Samuel Fielden to Governor Richard J. Oglesby .....	40
Appendix C: Facsimile of letter from August Spies to William M. Salter .....	41
Appendix D: Facsimile of telegram from William M. Salter to William Dean Howells on eve of executions .....	43
Appendix E: The Haymarket defendants .....	44
References .....	46
Selected Bibliography .....	49

20/75



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Eleanor Marx's letter to William Dean Howells is published here by permission of the Houghton Library, Harvard University. Thanks are due Professor Howard A. Wilson, chairman of the Department of English at Knox College, as well as the editors of the Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society, for permission to quote from Dr. Wilson's excellent article in that publication.

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## WILLIAM DEAN HOWELLS AND THE HAYMARKET ERA

For many weeks, for months, it has not been for one hour out of my waking thoughts: it is the first thing when I rise up. It blackens my life. . . . I feel the horror and the shame of the crime which the law is about to commit against justice.

These anguished words were written to a friend by William Dean Howells, the foremost literary man of his time, shortly before the hanging of the four Haymarket martyrs on November 11, 1887.

They are buried under an impressive monument at Waldheim Cemetery in Forest Hill Park, Chicago. August Spies was indeed prophetic when he said on the scaffold, "There will come a time when our silence will be more powerful than the voices you strangle today."

Not long after the executions in the Cook County jail in Chicago Howells received a letter from London. The correspondent said she would be enclosing "one or two" short stories by a Norwegian author which she had translated into English.

"I take the liberty of sending you the translations," the writer said, because ". . . I have known you were not only a true artist and a great writer, but that even rarer thing, a brave and just man. All that you have written of late, and the way in which you speak of the 'unnecessary suffering' of the great mass of humanity tell me that you feel with the people. . . ." (Emphasis in original.) She and her husband, Dr. Edward Aveling, had lectured on Socialism "in the States," she added. "My father's name I am sure you know -- Karl Marx."



The letter, which was undated, was signed by Eleanor Marx-Aveling.\*

While in the United States on a lecture tour in 1886, Marx's youngest daughter and her husband had jointly issued a letter to the press headed "Chicago, 1886," which declared:

Eight of the men arrested without warrant were tried by a jury more than one of which had declared their minds to be made up as to the guilt of the accused; before a judge whose every word and deed during the trial was that of an advocate for the prosecution; at a time when most of the American newspapers were clamoring for the blood of these men, upon evidence insufficient to convict a man of picking pockets.

In one of her lectures here, Eleanor Marx charged:

...If the sentence is carried out, it will be one of the most infamous legal murders that has ever been perpetrated. . . .I am not an anarchist, but I feel all the more that I am bound to say this. . . . (1)

\* \* \*

Howells, one of the few Americans of note to rise to the defense of the accused, was born on March 1, 1837, at Martins Ferry, Ohio. Both his father and grandfather were abolitionists.\*\* At the age of nine he began to set type in his father's printshop. His formal education stopped short of high school (as was common then). As a boy apprentice he began to read and was stirred by the works of Cervantes, Shakespeare, Pope, and Heine. Later, he joined the staff of the Ohio State Journal (1856-61), covering the state capital at Columbus, and began to write poetry. In 1860 and 1861 some of his verses were published in The Atlantic Monthly, of which he was to become editor.

\* For a facsimile of the letter, see Appendix A.

\*\* "...sympathy for the slave had been cardinal in Howells's childhood morality. For that his family had been hounded out of Hamilton, had suffered and failed in Dayton, had fought triumphantly in Ashtabula County," as Edwin H. Cady put it in The Realist at War.

So impressive was his campaign biography of Abraham Lincoln (written when he was twenty-three) that it won him appointment as U.S. consul in Venice (1861-65). This biography was simple, factual and moving, with none of the specious political rhetoric so dear to that epoch -- and ours. (A facsimile edition of the biography, with Lincoln's annotations in his own hand, was issued by the Indiana University Press on the centenary of the book's initial appearance.)

Howells became assistant editor of The Atlantic Monthly upon his return from Italy in 1865, and for ten years was its chief editor (1871-81). He was to be the mentor of many new American writers, including Frank Norris,\* Stephen Crane, Hamlin Garland, and the Black poet Paul Laurence Dunbar. His review of Thorstein Veblen's The Theory of the Leisure Class brought that social critic national attention. Subsequently Howells joined the staff of Harper's Weekly and was an important influence on trends in American realism.

Howells's career covered exactly sixty years, his first book appearing in 1860. His published works numbered more than one hundred: novels, poems, plays, short stories, literary essays, travel sketches, and autobiography. There is general agreement among critics that Howells, in the course of his work, influenced the art of fiction more than any other American writer of his time.

Edwin Markham, author of "The Man with the Hoe," has written that "all men who are patriotic and intelligent should love William Dean Howells as one of the highest and noblest men in the modern world." [2]

As to the novelist's meager schooling, Harry Thurston Peck, professor of English at Columbia University, noted in his essay on Howells that "he . . . drank in the subtlest understanding of that stratum of society which is the basis of the whole gigantic system. And for his purpose it was lucky that he never had the academic training, which, though it sharpens the critical powers, too often narrows the sympathies and deadens the creative faculty." [3]

\* In the North American Review (December 1902) Howells paid high tribute to Norris's work, especially McTeague and The Octopus, which, he said, liberated American fiction "from the casual and the occasional, in which it seemed lastingly trammelled." Howells pioneered in recognizing those writers who were portraying the rise of the Robber Barons.



\*                      \*                      \*

What has been inaccurately described as the Haymarket "riot" took place at the corner of Desplaines and Randolph streets in Chicago on the evening of May 4, 1886, at a public meeting to protest the shooting down of strikers by police the previous day at the McCormick Harvesting Machine Company. (Dozens of similar gatherings were part of the surging movement for the eight-hour day, and police brutality had become a pattern.)

Among those present at the Haymarket Square meeting was Chicago's mayor, Carter Harrison, Sr. He remained until the crowd, estimated at fifteen hundred, began to disperse; seeing that things were quiet, he departed for home. As Governor John Peter Altgeld described it six years later:

As soon as [Police] Captain Bonfield . . . learned that the Mayor had gone, he took a detachment of police and hurried to the meeting for the purpose of dispersing the few that remained, and as the police approached, a bomb was thrown, which exploded and wounded many, and killed several . . . .

Bonfield, one labor historian has written, "sent 176 policemen to march upon the little crowd that remained." Seven policemen and four others were killed; seventy persons were injured. [4]

The Chicago police seized August Spies, Adolph Fischer, Samuel Fielden, George Engel, Michael Schwab, Oscar Neebe, and Louis Lingg. Above all, they wanted to lay their hands on Albert Parsons, editor of the Alarm.

All of the accused, according to Gustavus Myers, author of the classic work History of the Great American Fortunes, were "more or less deep students of economics and sociology; they had become convinced that the fundamental cause of the prevalent inequalities of opportunity and of the widespread misery was the capitalist system itself. Hence they opposed it uncompromisingly."

A manhunt was launched for Parsons. Learning of the arrest of his comrades, Parsons had left Chicago and gone to the home of a friend in Geneva, Wisconsin, and from there

to Waukesha, in the same state. On the eve of the trial, at the urging of the chief defense counsel, Captain William R. Black, he gave himself up in an effort to bolster the cause of his fellow defendants.

Light on Parsons's disappearance is shed by Mrs. Lizzie Holmes in a letter to Caro Lloyd, sister of Henry Demarest Lloyd, journalist and social reformer. Mrs. Holmes, a pioneer organizer of Chicago's working women, recorded:

I remember that Mr. Parsons returned to the courthouse in Chicago on the morning of June 21, 1886. He had been safely hidden by my husband, W. T. Holmes and Mr. David [Daniel] Hoan\* of Waukesha [, they being] the only persons in the world who knew where he was.

Mrs. Holmes quoted her husband as saying:

When I heard he [Parsons] had gone to Chicago to stand trial, I hastened to . . . the jail. I said to him: "Do you know what you have done?" and he said, "Yes, thoroughly. I never expect . . . to be a free man again. They will kill me, but I could not bear to be at liberty knowing that my comrades were here and were to suffer for a crime of which they were as innocent as I." [5]

In surrendering so as to stand by his comrades, Parsons had no illusions about the trial, which proved to be a farce. It took place in the midst of fierce labor struggles against the brutalities of trusts, corporations, and government giveaways to Big Business.

Indicted specifically for the murder of Mathias Degan, a Chicago policeman on the scene at Haymarket, the defendants faced trial on June 21, 1886, a trial which attracted world-wide attention. The presiding judge was Joseph E. Gary.\*\*

\* His son, Dan Hoan, Jr., later served as Socialist mayor of Milwaukee, 1916-1940.

\*\* A number of writers on Haymarket have confused Joseph E. Gary with Elbert H. Gary, for many years board chairman of the U.S. Steel Corporation.



The accused were not charged with having thrown the bomb, but were tried on a novel legal theory of "constructive crime," that is, that their writings and speeches incited some unknown person or persons to commit the outrage.

According to one scholar, Judge Gary named a special bailiff to summon a jury of his own selection. Out of a panel of one thousand, only five were workers, and these were promptly "excused" by the prosecution. "In vain did the defense try to show that four of the eight accused were not even at the meeting. The men were tried...for their political views." [6]

Commenting on the Haymarket era in his autobiography, Robert Morss Lovett recalled that some of the defendants had spoken at the University of Chicago, where he was a member of the faculty. He described the trial as "a shocking travesty of justice" and told how the judge, "sitting on the bench with prominent ladies beside him as guests, boasted of making the law as he went along." [7]

Addressing a hostile judge and jury, August Spies hurled this challenge:

Now these are my ideas. I cannot divest myself of them, nor would I, if I could. And if you think you can crush out these ideas that are gaining ground more and more every day . . . by sending us to the gallows; if you would once more have people suffer the penalty of death because they have dared to tell the truth . . . I say if death is the penalty for proclaiming the truth, then I will proudly and defiantly pay the costly price! Call your hangman! Truth crucified in Socrates, in Christ, in Giordano Bruno, in Hus, in Galileo, still lives. They and others whose name is legion have preceded us on this path. We are ready to follow. . . .

The case went to the jury on August 19, 1886, and the next day the accused were declared guilty. All the defendants except Neebe were sentenced to death by hanging. Neebe was given a fifteen-year prison term. This was not entirely unexpected because the prosecutor had acknowledged that there was no case against him.

\* \* \*

The role of the press in spreading hysteria, distortion, and propaganda was a mighty factor in assuring a conviction -- as has happened so many times before and after.

Anticipating an unfavorable decision by the Illinois Supreme Court, to which the case had gone on appeal, the defendants engaged several prominent lawyers to carry their fight to the U.S. Supreme Court. These included Leonard Swett, Abraham Lincoln's one-time law partner, and Roger A. Pryor, a former newspaperman who had been a strong "states' rights" man and had reached the rank of general in the Confederate Army. "If there was a plot in existence," Pryor said on entering the case, "do you suppose that the defendants would have had their wives and children there?"

On September 14, 1887, the Illinois Supreme Court denied the writ of error, thus sustaining the convictions. In its appeal, the defense had cited violations of the "due process" clause of the Fourteenth Amendment of the U.S. Constitution, as well as the Fifth and Sixth Amendments. Some of the principal defense arguments centered on the nature of jury selection.

An appeal for a writ of habeas corpus was then taken to a U.S. circuit court on behalf of Spies and the other defendants. This appeal, too, was denied, and the denial was affirmed by the U.S. Supreme Court. Soon afterward -- on November 10, 1887, twenty-nine hours before the scheduled executions -- Louis Lingg, one of the defendants, committed suicide in his cell.\*

Eleven days after the Illinois tribunal ruled against the men, Howells had written to Pryor expressing gratification that he had agreed to take the case to the high court. Pryor replied:

There is a grave doubt whether, in the whirlwind of passion which swept over Chicago, that the Anarchists have had a fair trial. . . . It is in harmony with the spirit of justice

\* When I interviewed the widow of Albert Parsons in Chicago in 1934, she said she was convinced that the police were implicated in the death of Lingg.



and humanity of your writings that you desire a fair and legal trial even for Anarchists. Such trial, I assure you on my honor they have not had, and such trial it is the object of my endeavors to assure them. . . . A temperate claim on behalf of the Anarchists . . . under the imprimatur of your name, cannot but be of wholesome and happy effect. [8]

Howells decided to write a letter along the lines suggested by Pryor, but his signature was to be the only one. He had asked his friend George W. Curtis, editor of Harper's Weekly, and John Greenleaf Whittier to join him. Both declined. "A letter from you," Howells wrote the Abolitionist poet, "would have great weight with him [Governor Richard J. Oglesby]. I beseech you to write it and do what one great and blameless man may do to avert the greatest wrong that ever threatened our fame as a nation." On September 24, 1887, Whittier replied:

"I am opposed to capital punishment and have striven to have the death penalty abolished, but I have never interfered with the law as it affects individual cases. And, I can see no reason for making the case of the anarchists an exception." Whittier ended his letter amiably, "I am always thy admirer and friend." [9]

It is damaging to Whittier's reputation that he later appeared to agree with another poet, James Russell Lowell,\* that "the rascals were well hanged." [10]

Curtis was as evasive as Whittier. Howells wrote Curtis: "Of course I feel the force of what you say, and that a man strange to the rules of law should have the ground sure under his feet before he questions the decisions of two courts of law. In my own case you are mistaken as to a 'mastery of the facts.'" Howells was convinced that the Chicago trial was "hysterical" and "unjust." The men, he added, had been "persecuted, not prosecuted."

\* Lowell in other years had castigated both the war with Mexico and American slavery in the Biglow Papers, his book-length verses of social commentary written in the vernacular.

Though he was under great emotional stress because of the baffling malady of his daughter, Winifred,\* who was being treated in a nearby sanatorium, Howells was impelled to write again to Curtis from Lake George, New York, on August 10, 1887:

I feel more than ever that it was not a fair trial either as to the selection of the jury or the rulings of the judge. . . . They are condemned to death upon a principle that would have sent every ardent anti-slavery man to the gallows.

To his friend Mark Twain, Howells wrote: "If ever the public was betrayed by the press, it's ours. No man could safely make himself heard in behalf of the strikers any more than for the anarchists." [11] There is no direct evidence that Clemens shared Howells's passionate concern, although it is known that he had received and read several pamphlets about the trial that Howells had sent him. Clemens had already fallen into the mood of fatalism and pessimism that was to characterize the rest of his life.

\* \* \*

Without question, it was Howells's eminence in American letters which caused the New York Tribune to print his appeal in its issue of November 6, 1887:

As I have petitioned the Governor of Illinois to commute the death penalty of the anarchists to imprisonment and have also personally written him in their behalf, I ask your leave to express here the hope that those who are inclined to do either will not lose faith in themselves because the Supreme Court has denied the condemned a writ of error. That court simply affirmed the legality of the forms under which the Chicago court proceeded; . . . and it by no means approved the principle of punishing them because of their

\* Her ailment was diagnosed in the nebulous medical terminology of the time as "neurasthenia." She died at the age of twenty-six.



frantic opinions, for a crime which they were not shown to have committed. The justice or injustice of their sentence was not before the highest tribunal of our law, and unhappily could not be got there. That question must remain for history, which judges the judgment of courts, to deal with, and I, for one, cannot doubt what the judgment of history will be.

But the worst still is for a very few days reparable; the men sentenced to death are still alive, and their lives may be finally saved through the clemency of the Governor, whose prerogative is now the supreme law in their case. I conjure all those who believe that it would be either injustice or impolicy to put them to death to join in urging him by petition, by letter or through the press and from the pulpit and the platform to use his power, in the only direction where it can never be misused, for the mitigation of their punishment.

Commenting on Howells's letter, Henry David, author of the definitive study of Haymarket, reports that not all liberals were equally courageous. "Many gave way before the pressure of the press and the hysteria of fear. In many, their property sense dulled their social conscience, and they slipped behind the comforting wall of legality which the courts had erected." [12]

Haymarket, David concluded, brought about "the first major 'red-scare' which has rarely been equalled." (The historian was writing after the notorious Palmer raids but before the McCarthyite cold-war terror with its Smith Act prosecutions, witch-hunts, and blacklists.)

Howells's act in writing his appeal to the Illinois governor has been described by one author as "a revolution in American literature":

William Dean Howells, who had succeeded Lowell as editor of the Atlantic Monthly, who had been offered the succession to the

Harvard chair occupied by the exalted figures of Ticknor, Longfellow and Lowell, and who was already settling into the dignity of dean of American letters which he was to hold for the next thirty years -- William Dean Howells, archpriest of the genteel tradition -- deserted the study for the arena and published an open letter defending the Chicago anarchists. [13]

"A file of newspaper and magazine clippings in the Howells Papers at Harvard University," Kenneth S. Lynn has written, "gives a fair indication of the coast-to-coast abuse the novelist sustained as a result of his lonely act of courage." [14]

\* \* \*

Acutely aware of the risks he was taking, Howells jeopardized not only his reputation but his livelihood as well.\* (The author's wife, Elinor, fully supported him in his efforts.) But he did not remain entirely alone. He was soon joined by Robert Ingersoll, noted lawyer and exponent of agnosticism; Henry Demarest Lloyd; General Matthew M. Trumbull, a veteran of the Mexican and Civil wars; John Brown, Jr., one of the few surviving sons of the great anti-slavery fighter; John Swinton, the radical journalist who had interviewed Karl Marx in 1880;\*\* and Joseph Buchanan, a labor editor and trade union organizer in Colorado.

Ingersoll publicly declared that the "men were tried during a period of great excitement," when a fair trial was an impossibility. He said the court's rulings were "wrong." Under the instructions given the jury by Judge Gary, he added, any man who spoke in favor of a change of government would have been convicted of murder.

\* Howells was under contract to the conservative firm of Harper's at a salary of ten thousand dollars a year, a fabulous sum in those days. In addition, he was one of America's most popular novelists, with his works selling in large numbers.

\*\* See John Swinton: American Radical, by Sender Garlin. (AIMS Occasional Paper No. 20 [1976].)



In October 1887 a mass meeting was held in the Great Hall of Cooper Union in New York City. Among the speakers were Samuel Gompers, president of the American Federation of Labor; Daniel DeLeon, who later became leader of the Socialist Labor Party, and Peter McGuire, "father" of Labor Day in the U.S.

In England the campaign was led by the Socialist artist and writer William Morris. He sought the aid of the poet Robert Browning on behalf of the Chicago defendants: "I venture to write you and ask you to sign the enclosed appeal for mercy and do what you can to save the lives of seven men who had been condemned to death for a deed of which they were not guilty. . . ." George Bernard Shaw joined Morris in addressing a mass rally in London and faced the opposition of a hostile press.

Long after the Haymarket events, E. P. Thompson wrote in his study of William Morris that "Bismarck's Anti-Socialist laws had attracted favorable attention in England, and the judicial murder of the anarchists in Chicago . . . had emboldened reactionaries to preach openly from the text, 'Go thou, and do likewise.' On the day after the Chicago executions . . . The Times [of London] published a remarkable editorial, denouncing the public petitions throughout the United States for clemency to the Anarchists as a 'mischievous practice . . . and unparalleled amount of illegitimate pressure': complaining at the 'lax discipline which enabled Lingg . . . to disappoint the hangman. . . .'" [15]

At the same time, in France, according to a study of Albert Parsons, "the left wing of the Chamber of Deputies petitioned Governor Oglesby to spare the lives of the men." [16]

Urged by their friends, three of the defendants -- Spies, Schwab, and Fielden -- sent this letter to Governor Oglesby one week before the scheduled executions:

In order that the truth may be known by you, and the public you represent, we desire to state that we never advocated the use of force, except in cases of self-

\* No reply appears in either man's published correspondence.

defense. To accuse us of having attempted to overthrow law and government on May 4, 1886, or at any other time, is as false as it is absurd. Whatever we said or did was said and done publicly; we have never conspired or plotted to commit an unlawful act. While we attacked the present social arrangements in writing and speech, and exposed their iniquities, we have never consciously broken any laws. So far from having planned the killing of anybody at the Haymarket, the very object of the meeting was to protest against the commission of murder! All our efforts have been in the direction to elevate mankind, and to remove as much as possible the cause of crime in society. Our labor was unselfish; no notion of personal gain or ambition prompted us. Thousands and thousands will bear testimony to this. We may have erred at times in our judgment -- yes, but we may have "loved mankind, not wisely, but too well."\*

\* \* \*

The Chicago press was venomous before -- and after -- Haymarket. At a mass meeting on July 22, 1877, Albert Parsons had denounced the press in general and the Chicago Tribune in particular. Unemployment, he said, was growing as new machinery was being installed to "rationalize" the labor force.

Next morning the Tribune counterattacked. In an editorial it demanded that railwaymen who refused to take wage cuts and dismissal notices "step out of the way . . . if they will not step out voluntarily, they must be made to by force." The editorial went on to describe the strikers as "the scum and filth of the city."

\* For a facsimile of the letter, see Appendix B.



Three days later the same newspaper declared: "Capitalists would offer any sum to see the leaders . . . strung up to a telegraph pole." [17] Yet, only a year earlier, on the occasion of America's Centennial (July 4, 1876), the Tribune had loftily observed that "suddenly acquired wealth, decked in all the colors of the rainbow, flaunts its robes before the eyes of Labor, and laughs with contempt at honest poverty." [18]

Two years prior to Haymarket the same newspaper had declared editorially:

The simplest plan, probably, when one is not a member of the Humane Society, is to put arsenic in the supplies of food furnished the unemployed or the tramp. This produces death in a short time and is a warning to other tramps to keep out of the neighborhood. [19]

\* \* \*

The Haymarket issue provided Theodore Roosevelt with an opportunity to display his brand of "Americanism." A candidate for mayor of New York City against Henry George in 1886, Roosevelt was flexing his muscles at his ranch in South Dakota. Asked for his stand on the case, he wrote in a letter:

My men [presumably the workers on his ranch] are hard-working laboring men, who work longer hours for no greater wages than most of the strikers; but they are Americans through and through. I believe nothing would give them greater pleasure than a chance with rifles at one of the mobs. [Emphasis in original.]

In an article written two years later, this much-publicized game hunter and imperialist was to record: ". . . the day that the Anarchists were hung in Chicago, my men joined with the rest of the neighborhood in burning them in effigy." [20] And in 1887, during the Haymarket struggle, the steel magnate Andrew Carnegie had proclaimed: "I defy any man to show that there is pauperism in the U.S." This was at a time when millions of Americans were suffering unemployment and privation.

The chief of the increasingly conservative Knights of Labor, Terence V. Powderly, chided: "At Chicago the sound of the bomb did more injury to the good name of Labor than all the attacks of that year." [21] This statement is challenged, however, by an authority on farmer and labor parties who asserted:

Contrary to the oft-expressed easy generalization that the Haymarket bomb destroyed the Chicago labor movement, the fact is that despite police repression, newspaper incitement to hysteria, and organization of the possessing classes, which followed the throwing of the bomb on May 4, 1886, the Chicago wage-earners only united their forces and stiffened their resistance. [22]

\* \* \*

Alone of New York's English-language press, which then included many newspapers, John Swinton's Paper "retained some measure of sanity," blaming the Haymarket bomb on the police. The publication (August 22, 1886) could not see how any jury could convict the defendants "upon the flimsy and perjured evidence of the spies and informers who were the principal witnesses against them." [23]

Howells was not the only one who, in the shock of Haymarket, perceived the inadequacy and injustice of the social order. Richard T. Ely, a pioneer American labor economist and, in his early years, an academic maverick, wrote in his autobiography:

In the last quarter of the nineteenth century the American people witnessed a crisis in the labor movement. It was marked by a deep stirring of the masses -- not a local stirring, not merely a national stirring -- but an international, world wide stirring of the masses. The manner of producing material goods was examined critically



and pronounced faulty. The distribution of these goods . . . was also critically examined and pronounced iniquitous. Proposals were made for new modes of production and distribution of economic goods. The masses desired changes, not merely in surface phenomena, but in the very foundations of the social order. [24]

\* \* \*

It was by studying the evidence in the case, according to Professor Howard A. Wilson of Knox College, that Howells concluded the condemned men "proved themselves absolutely guiltless of the murder charged upon them." [25] The most dramatic record of Howells's reaction to the case, Wilson points out, is to be found in a series of letters to William Mackintire Salter, a Chicago clergyman and lecturer for the Chicago Ethical Culture Society.

Salter's view of the Haymarket events was contradictory, and he was to alter it, according to Professor Henry David. The evidence against Parsons, Spies, Fielden, and Schwab, Salter declared, "is not such as to convince any fairminded unprejudiced man beyond reasonable doubt." This assertion, however, he immediately qualified:

I do not say because the four I have mentioned are not guilty, they are therefore guiltless of any connection whatever with the Haymarket crime. They are simply not guilty of the crime with which they were charged. They were not accessories to the murder of Degan. . . . They are guilty of sedition, of stirring up insurrection. . . . [Emphasis in original.]

Howells wrote Salter on November 1, 1887 from Danville, New York:

I have read with grateful satisfaction your discourse on the condemned Anarchists. I have never thought they had a fair trial, and I find by your statement of the case that I had clearly

acquainted myself with the facts. I have already both signed a petition for commutation of their sentence, and have written a letter to the governor in their behalf. Is there any hope of clemency? Is there anything more to be done? You may remember meeting me at Prof. James's in Cambridge. If you do, kindly present my regards to Mrs. Salter.\* [26]

Several days later (November 3), Mrs. Salter wrote to Howells on behalf of her husband. She thanked him for granting permission to publish his letter to Governor Oglesby. "It will doubtless influence many," she wrote.

My husband has sent copies of his petition to the East -- Boston, Cambridge and New York, and is devoting all his time and strength circulating it here. Popular opinion is in favor of carrying out of the sentence, the press having been particularly bloodthirsty, but men of great weight in the city -- a few -- are beginning to be heard advocating mercy, and Mr. Salter feels that if there were a little more time, much might be accomplished in the way of getting it. [Emphasis added.]

On November 3, 1887, eight days before he and his comrades were put to death, Spies had written to Salter:

Captain Black [chief defense attorney before the Illinois Court] has written an appeal to the governor signed by some of us which contains essentially the same statements. Whether under the circumstances it is wise to present the letter I enclose in this also -- this you may decide. I think it would be well if you would simply explain to

\* Salter and William James, the Harvard philosopher, were brothers-in-law. Mrs. Salter was a sister of Mrs. William James.



the governor orally any things that he does not seem to understand. I am, as a matter of course, sorry for the poor devils who lost their lives at the Haymarket, but I am more so for the lives of the poor devils who perished on the previous day. Who cares for their wretched families? Nobody. Now for me to express condolences over the killing of the policemen and not at the same time over that of the poor fellows at McCormick's or at East St. Louis, would be an act of hypocrisy such as I would not be guilty of under any circumstances. Suffice it to say that I abhor murder in every form. If I did not I would never have become a socialist.

Whether or not to make use of the accompanying letter, I leave entirely to your good judgment.

Thanking you for the keen interest you have taken in our case, I am

Yours very truly,  
A. Spies\* [27]

\* \* \*

Spies had evidently been acquainted with Salter prior to Haymarket, for on March 18, 1884, he had invited Salter to speak before the Chicago Turnverein "on behalf of betterment of our public schools." Spies wrote Salter: "As you undoubtedly know, the Common Council of this city under the inspiration of the Roman Church opposes the establishment of a more perfect school system than the present one by withholding the necessary funds." [28]

Edwin D. Mead, a cousin of Mrs. Howells, was editor of the influential New England Magazine. Howells wrote Mead on November 13:

\* For a facsimile of Spies's letter to Salter, see Appendix C.

I got your postal while I still had some foolish hope that the lives of these hapless men could be saved. Of course I never doubted where you stood -- it was as if I touched your true hand in the dark and knew that you were beside the few not drunk and blind with the fear and hate that seem to have debauched this nation. . . . I too had studied the case, and found none of the men connected by credible proof with any "plot" against society's forces on the occasion of the policeman's murder, for which they were convicted. [29]

In a postscript to a letter to Salter on November 14, 1887, Howells had written: "Do send me a copy of your review of the Anarchist case. I sent mine to a great and good man whom I was fool enough to hope I might move to join in the plea for mercy." This was apparently a reference to the poet Whittier, to whom Howells had written on November 1: "I enclose a paper on the anarchists by a very good and able minister of Chicago."

Writing to Salter on December 25, 1887, Howells asked whether he knew about "the case of Rev. J. C. Kimball, of Hartford, who preached a clemency sermon and met with persecution in his community." [30] In his sermon, Reverend Kimball, pastor of the First Congregational Society, declared that the hanging of the Haymarket defendants "was comparable to the crucifixion of Christ. . . . A motion to eject him was roundly defeated and a resolution passed that the society was proud to have in its pulpit ministers who 'were in advance of the public sentiment . . . and dared again and again to take an unpopular side.'" [31]

\* \* \*

Harper's Weekly, owned by Howells's publisher, in commenting on the rejection of the Haymarket defendants' appeal to the Illinois Supreme Court, observed that the decision was received by the press "with universal approval." The entire case was reviewed by the publication on November 19, 1887. The factual account of the hangings was illustrated with unsigned drawings of August Spies in his cell, and of Death Row. The writer, presumably George W. Curtis, declared that "law and order must be maintained when revolution threatens." [32]



Nine days after the executions, Howells wrote to Salter that he had suggested publication of a book "embodying expressions of sympathy and protest from those who made them, and a narrative of the efforts of the clemency committees. . . . I will be glad to contribute a letter, which is the only thing not covered by my present contract." [33]

The proposal for the memorial book had gone to Francis Fisher Browne (1845-1913), a friend, and editor of the Dial, but nothing came of it.

Four days later Salter received another message from Howells:

I shall be glad to get poor Spies's letter, which it wrung my heart to read in print. Do you mean to give it to me? By the way, I should like to have fotografs of the four murdered men -- in fact of the whole eight accused, including Neebe. Can you get them for me?

Howells added:

Did you see the letter I printed in the New York Tribune Nov. 6? All the papers abused it, but few copied it. What a squalid and vulgar oligarchy of half-bred scribblers we live under! Somehow their power must be broken. [34]

A month later he informed Salter: "The press continues as atrocious as ever, but I believe it never fairly represented the whole sentiment of the community." Thanking Salter for the gift of the Spies letter, Howells wrote on December 1: "I value it most highly; it seems to be the touch of a dying man on my hand." The novelist acknowledged to Salter receipt of Spies's picture on December 11, 1887, exactly one month after the executions:

I think of these men every day, and of the wrong their names are under, and long to have them righted before the world. The fotograf of Spies is most interesting. What an intelligent, earnest good face! And that man hanged! Incredible! [Emphasis in original.] [35]

Howells branded the executions "damnable" and "abominable" and declared that "we have committed an atrocious and irreparable crime." The trial, he said, had been ruled not by justice but by passion, "by terror, by prejudice, by hate, by newspaper."

On January 15, 1888, two months after the judicial lynchings, Howells displayed his intense feelings in a letter to Hamlin Garland, the American realistic novelist whose work he had long encouraged and praised:

You'll easily believe that I did not bring myself to the point of openly befriending these men who were civically murdered for their opinions without thinking and feeling much, and my horizons have been indefinitely widened by the process. . . . I am reading and thinking about questions that carry me beyond myself and my miserable little idolatries of the past. . . . [36]

\* \* \*

An uncritical Art Young -- later to become a noted radical artist -- had been taken in by the press propaganda surrounding the Haymarket case. Young wrote:

Not until several years later did I discover there was another side to the story. So when asked by a publisher to draw a cover for a paper-bound anti-Anarchist book, I readily assented. Anarchists and Bomb-Throwers was the title of this volume, and it upheld the convictions. My picture showed Law and Order personified by an Amazonian woman, throttling a bunch of dangerous-looking men.

If the dead can hear, I ask forgiveness now for that act. I was young and I had been misled by the clamor of many voices raised to justify a dark and shameful deed. [37]



Art Young had interviewed and made sketches of the prisoners in Death Row of the Cook County jail in Chicago. In his autobiography, he recalled: "From England protests against the execution were cabled by William Morris, Walter Crane, Annie Besant, and Oscar Wilde. On a single day, 16,000 members of working-class organizations in London signed a plea to Governor Oglesby to save the doomed men. George Bernard Shaw was one of those who circulated the petition."

\* \* \*

In 1951, Professor John W. Ward of the University of Minnesota called attention to "an unnoticed and uncollected" Howells letter on Haymarket. This, he said, "deserves to be rescued from obscurity." [38] This unearthed communication had been addressed to the poet and editor Francis Fisher Browne. Howells's letter had not been intended for publication. Browne, however, evidently felt it might prove helpful to the defendants if given publicity.

Howells had written:

Thank you for sending me your poem, which I read with a heavy heart because of that "impending tragedy." For many weeks, for months, it has not been for one hour out of my waking thoughts; it is the last thing when I lie down, and the first thing when I rise up. It blackens my life. . . . I feel the horror and the shame of the crime which the law is about to commit against justice.

The Chicago Tribune editor on November 8, 1887, had placed Howells's letter below one from the meat-packing magnate Philip Armour, who had just returned from a tour of the West with the report that "the entire nation" supported the Haymarket verdict. This was "no time for maudlin sentiment or foolish tears," he admonished.

Professor Ward observed that, in addition to the editorial treatment, which Howells recognized as insulting, it was a personal letter, and Howells had not anticipated its public use. However, the author in no way regretted this. He wrote to Browne: "I perceived that what was written for the eye of a friend was somewhat hysterical in print," but, he continued:

If you and other humane persons believed that it might do good -- even so little where so much was needed -- you did right, and I approved and adopt your action. . . . While I write that hideous scene may be enacting in your jail yard -- the thing forever damnable before God and abominable to civilized men. [39]

On November 9, 1887 -- the eve of the executions -- Howells wired his friend Salter: PLEASE TELEGRAPH ME THE GOVERNOR'S DECISION ABOUT THE ANARCHISTS. At seven o'clock on the evening of the ninth, Governor Oglesby issued a statement saying that he had commuted to life imprisonment the sentences of Schwab and Fielden.\* He refused, however, to act on the clemency appeals of Spies, Fischer, and Engel. (Parsons did not associate himself with the clemency appeals.)

Shortly after noon on November 11, 1887, Parsons, Spies, Fischer, and Engel were hanged.\*\*

To his father, Howells wrote on November 13, 1887:

I send you the Tribune, with my unavailing word for the Anarchists. All is over now, except the judgment that begins at once for every unjust and evil deed and goes on forever. The historical perspective is that this free Republic has killed five men for their opinions.

In the same vein he informed his sister, Anna, a week later that "it's all been an atrocious piece of frenzy and cruelty, for which we must stand ashamed forever before history." The cataclysmic destruction of his illusions continued to oppress him. He wrote his sister:

\* For a facsimile of Salter's telegraphic reply to Howells, see Appendix D.

\*\* The police reported that Lingg had committed suicide the previous morning. For a contrary view, see note, page 7, and Appendix E.



Elinor [Mrs. Howells] and I both no longer care for the world's life and would like to be settled down very humbly and simply, where we could be socially identified with the principles of progress and sympathy for the struggling masses.

\* \* \*

On June 26, 1893, six years after the Haymarket martyrs stood on the scaffold, Governor John Peter Altgeld freed the remaining three held in the Illinois State Prison at Joliet. In his Reasons for Pardoning Fielden, Neebe, and Schwab, Altgeld declared:

1. The jury was a packed jury selected to convict; 2. according to the law as laid down by the Supreme Court, both prior to, and again since the trial of this case, the jurors, according to their own answers, were not competent jurors and the trial was therefore not a legal trial; 3. the defendants were not proven guilty of the crime charged in the indictment; 4. as to the defendant Neebe, the state's attorney had declared at the close of the evidence that there was no case against him, and yet he had been kept in prison all these years; 5. the trial judge was either so prejudiced against the defendants, or else so determined to win the applause of a certain class in the community that he could not and did not grant a fair trial.

Much of the evidence, Altgeld stressed, was "pure fabrication." Some prominent police officials, the state's chief executive charged, "threw . . . men into prison and threatened them with torture if they refused to swear to anything they [the police] desired . . . but offered money and employment to those who would consent." Further -- and this has a strikingly contemporary ring -- the police officials "deliberately planned to have fictitious conspiracies formed in order that they might get the glory of discovering them."

Six years had passed. And the first name signed to the pardon petition was that of Lyman J. Gage, later U.S. Secretary of the Treasury under Presidents William McKinley and Theodore Roosevelt. [40]

\* \* \*

The noted labor lawyer Clarence Darrow recalled that it did not take long for the Illinois bar to come to the conclusion that the Haymarket verdict had been "brought about through malice and hatred, and that the trial itself was unfair and the judgment of the court unsound."

But despite the spreading conviction among the people of Illinois and throughout the nation that the defendants had been framed and legally murdered, the pardon created a firestorm of hatred in some quarters. The "Haymarket Pardon" effectively ended Altgeld's political career. (He had been the first Democratic governor to be elected in Illinois since the Civil War.) Darrow invited him to rejoin their old law firm. Altgeld accepted. He remained Darrow's colleague until his death.

Darrow pointed out that Fielden, Parsons, and Schwab were barely acquainted with Engel, Fischer, and Lingg. He cited the fact that Judge Gary had permitted the file of the Arbeiter-Zeitung, Spies's newspaper, and Parsons's Alarm, as well as Parsons's speeches in various parts of the country, to become part of the trial record.

Moreover, according to Darrow, the presiding judge -- concocting his own rules of evidence -- instructed the jury that if it believed that these articles and speeches contributed toward the throwing of the bomb, then it was justified in finding the defendants guilty of murder.

Darrow had made frequent visits to the Illinois state penitentiary, where Fielden, Neebe, and Schwab were confined. He "had come to love them as good and honest men, guilty only of the crime of striving to free mankind from its shackles," according to one of his biographers. All his life



he regretted that he had not participated in the Haymarket defense.\* [41]

\* \* \*

Recalling the agitation on behalf of the Haymarket defendants a decade after they had been executed, Eugene V. Debs, prominent Socialist leader and labor organizer, wrote:

The men who were judicially murdered in Chicago in 1887, in the great state of Illinois, were the avant couriers of a better day. They were called anarchists, but at their trial it was not proven that they had committed any crime or violated any law. They had protested against unjust laws and their brutal administration. [42]

An indication of Debs's continuing admiration for one of the most valiant defenders of the Chicago martyrs is the inclusion in his Scrapbook of an item from the Indianapolis News (November 19, 1899) announcing a lecture by Howells on "Novels and Novel-Writing." [43]

\* \* \*

It would be unjust to believe that Howells's conscience was stirred only by the Haymarket outrage. Six years earlier -- in 1880 -- he had accepted for publication in The Atlantic Monthly "The Story of a Great Monopoly," Henry Demarest Lloyd's expose of the buccaneering practices of the Standard Oil Company. (This was a precursor of Ida M. Tarbell's later revelations.) The Atlantic had printed articles criticizing ruthless, free-enterprise Big Business, but never one so damning as Lloyd's. Howells's key role in presenting such an exposé to an important segment of society was most aptly described in this observation:

\* Darrow subsequently defended Eugene V. Debs and the American Railway Union (1894); Moyer, Haywood and Pettibone of the Western Federation of Miners (1907); the McNamara brothers in Los Angeles (1911); twenty members of the Communist Labor Party in Chicago (1920), among them Max Bedacht, Charles Krumbein, and William Bross Lloyd, the millionaire son of Henry Demarest Lloyd; and, finally, Dr. Ossian Sweet of Detroit, a Black physician charged with murder for defending his home against an armed racist mob (1925).

The impact on the country of Lloyd's disclosures of secret rebates, extortion, bribery, and perjury was considerable. An unprecedented seven printings of the magazine had to be run off before the demand was satisfied and Lloyd's article was widely reprinted in newspapers, particularly in the West. It is of course significant that the forerunner of the muckraking articles should appear in a magazine edited by William Dean Howells. To accept such an essay in 1880 took a great deal of courage, for Americans, proud of their progress and material wealth, often looked upon the big corporations and trusts as major contributors to this advancement. Yet Howells apparently took the risk with no misgivings. [44]

\* \* \*

In June 1898 Howells helped sponsor a national conference on social reform in Buffalo, New York. The gathering adopted a declaration which asserted that "militarism . . . expressed in our war of conquest in the Philippines . . . is but the offspring and incident of the greater menace of plutocracy which has established monopoly government in place of government by the people." [45] Howells saw through the jingo rhetoric of the Spanish-American War to the real nature of America's imperialist grab.\* On January 31, 1898, he wrote Henry James:

We are in sight of peace. Our war for humanity has unmasked itself as a war for coaling stations, and we are going to keep our booty to punish Spain for putting us to the trouble of using violence in robbing her.

Ten years earlier (August 30, 1888), Howells had written Edward Everett Hale that ". . . at present it seems to me that our competitive civilization is a state of warfare and a game of chance, in which each man fights and bets against fearful odds."

\* ". . . a splendid little war" is how John Hay, U.S. Ambassador to England, described it in a letter to Theodore Roosevelt. [46]



Haymarket -- like a bolt of lightning -- was, however, the single searing experience that fused Howells's critique of his society and tore away the last cobwebs of illusion. The effects of the trauma were clearly seen in the development of Howells as a novelist and critic. His bibliographical note to his novel A Hazard of New Fortunes (1890) is significant:

The shedding of blood which is for the remission of sins had been symbolized by the bombs and scaffolds of Chicago. . . . Opportunely for me there was a great street-car strike in New York, and the story began to find its way to issues nobler and larger than those of the love affairs common to fiction.

One cannot help noticing that some years later Theodore Dreiser too was stirred and drawn into the drama of a streetcar strike, which he depicted when he drew the memorable figure of Hurstwood in decline in Sister Carrie. Dreiser, his novels still unwritten, his ordeals with censorship still to be undergone, had found Howells "truly generous and humane . . . a wholly honest man."

While struggling as a free-lance writer, Dreiser interviewed Howells for the magazine Success. After responding to a number of questions about his career, Howells concluded the interview by saying: "I have come to see life, not as the chase of a forever-impossible personal happiness, but as a field for endeavor toward the happiness of the whole human family. There is no other success." [47]

There is almost general agreement that the man who influenced Howells in the direction of Socialism was Laurence Gronlund (1846-1901), a Danish immigrant. Howells heard him lecture in Buffalo in 1888, then read his book, The Cooperative Commonwealth.<sup>\*</sup> He seems also to have been familiar with some essays on Socialism by William Morris.

<sup>\*</sup> Friedrich Engels, in a letter to Friedrich Sorge from London (July 3, 1885), was less than enthusiastic about Gronlund's political theories. [48]

It was Howells who brought to public notice the work of the young Black poet Paul Laurence Dunbar (1872-1906), then employed as an elevator operator in Dayton, Ohio, at a weekly wage of four dollars. Howells wrote not only an enthusiastic review of Dunbar's poems in Harper's but a commendatory preface to his Lyrics of a Lowly Life (1896), the book which made the poet a national literary figure.

Dunbar's "brilliant and unique" achievement, Howells said, "was to have studied the American Negro objectively, and to have represented him with . . . entire truthfulness." He concluded that Dunbar "has made the strongest claim for the Negro in English literature that the Negro has yet made."

Best known for his poetry, Dunbar, in his short life, also wrote four collections of short stories and four novels. He said he felt as though he had suddenly been "knighted" by Howells's acclaim. Evidently responding to a query from the novelist, Dunbar wrote: "I can tell you nothing about myself because there is nothing to tell. My whole life has been simple, obscure, and uneventful."

Brand Whitlock (1869-1934), author, reform mayor of Toledo, Ohio, and U.S. minister to Belgium, has described Dunbar's visit to Howells at the latter's cottage in Far Rockaway, New York:

The pride and delight Dunbar found in the visit were most charming to witness. It was late in September when this occurred, and as he was about to leave Mr. Howells noticed that Dunbar had no overcoat. So he insisted, against [his] protest, that Dunbar wear his. . . . The coat was much too large for Dunbar's slender frame, and he might have wrapped it about himself twice. The next day Dunbar returned the garment with a note of thanks, in which he confessed that he felt honored by wearing the great coat, though he was sure it was "an ass in the lion's skin." [49]

Whitlock, incidentally, had prepared the pardons that accompanied Governor Altgeld's statement. He was at the



time an assistant to the Illinois Secretary of State, William H. Hinrichsen. ". . . And so, one morning in June, very early," Whitlock wrote, "I was called to the governor . . . and told to make out pardons for Fielden, Neebe, and Schwab." [50]

\* \* \*

The noted Black leader W. E. B. Du Bois paid tribute to Howells in an editorial in The Crisis in 1913. Dr. Du Bois referred to Howells's An Imperative Duty (1893)\* and his sponsorship of Dunbar, as well as the fact that Howells was one of the original signers of the call that led to the formation of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. [51] Soon after Howells's death, Dr. Du Bois wrote that Howells was "perhaps the most distinguished of American authors." [52]

\* \* \*

". . . In spite of our divisions and classes, we are all Americans," Mrs. Makely says in Howells's A Traveler from Altruria (1894), "and if we haven't the same opinions and ideas on minor matters, we all have the same country." But the worker, Reuben Camp, responds:

I don't know about that. I don't believe we all have the same country. America is one thing for you, and it's quite another thing for us. America means ease, and comfort, and amusement for you, year in and year out, and if it means work, it's work that you wish to do. For us, America means work that we have to do, and hard work, all the time, if we're going to make both ends meet. It means liberty for you; but what liberty has a man got who doesn't know where his next meal is coming from? Once I was on strike, when I was working on the railroad, and I've seen men come and give up their liberty for a chance to earn their family's living. . . . Yes, we are all Americans, but I guess we haven't all got the same country, Mrs. Makely. What sort of country has a blacklisted man got? [Emphasis in original.]

\* A novella dealing with race prejudice.

Daniel Aaron has described another of Howells's novels, A Hazard of New Fortunes (1890), as "one of the most trenchant critiques of plutocratic values." In Aaron's view, Howells links the Civil War directly with the class conflicts of the post-Civil War gilded age, chattel slavery, and wage slavery. [53] And in his novel Annie Kilburn (1889), a story of industrial unrest in a New England village, Howells dramatically expressed his newly formulated social philosophy, which was a form of utopian socialism prevalent at the time.

A writer in a Marxist literary publication observed that, while Howells regarded himself as a Socialist, his socialism was "rooted in unscientific, utopian theories of the age. . . . If Howells's utopian socialism prevented him from seeing what, in the final analysis, had to be done, he knew nevertheless that capitalism was America's cancer, and that only the most fundamental changes could cure it." [54]

Among the reforms Howells advocated were:

- nationalization of monopolies, such as railroads, express and telegraph lines, gas and water works, telephone and electric-power circuits;
- preservation of the public domain and establishment of national parks;
- government aid and subsidies to farmers;
- public employment for the relief of the jobless;
- public control of housing;
- government-subsidized theater;
- old-age pensions;
- state-managed inns along public roads. [55]

Like Gronlund and Edward Bellamy (1850-1898),\* Howells believed that it was up to the "intellectual classes" to lead the way to Socialism. They had the notion that

\* Author of the utopian romance Looking Backward (1888).



capitalists could be persuaded that their best interests, too, would be served by such a course.

\* \* \*

Howells's deep sympathies were not confined to the local scene, as was evidenced by his scorn for the U.S. role in the Spanish-American war. He was to express his horror at the execution of the Irish Marxist James Connolly and his captured comrades following the Easter Rising in 1916 as a swift travesty of justice.

In a letter to The Nation, Howells wrote:

Nothing more lamentable in the course of the war now raging has come to pass than this act of bloody vengeance by the English government. . . . The shooting of the Irish insurrectionists is too much like the shooting of prisoners of war, too much like taking a leaf from the German classic of Schrecklichkeit; and in giving way to her vengeance, England has roused the moral sense of mankind against her. . . . [56]

\* \* \*

Reporting Howells's death at the age of 83, The New York Times (May 12, 1920) published a lengthy editorial lauding him for his charm, geniality, and versatility -- "the most distinguished purely American literary figure of his time." [57] But the newspaper passed over Howells's social concerns, his interest in Socialism, his agitation against the American imperialism of the time, his courageous crusade on behalf of the Haymarket martyrs.

As frequently happens, the radicalism of a person, once he is dead and unable to defend himself, is publicly ignored and an acceptable stereotype substituted. The myth of a bland Howells has too often been successfully perpetrated. His mature achievement and awareness and -- above all -- his social criticism have been generally ignored or minimized. The conventional wisdom was accepted even by such a liberal as the late Matthew Josephson, who, surprisingly, failed to gauge the depth and intensity of Howells's involvement, and his genuine courage. Josephson diminished Howells and the events of the time by writing unjustly that "when the press of the whole country called

for the blood of the seven anarchists, Howells did write a letter of beautiful indignation to the governor of Illinois, but no preachers or authors, from either Boston or New York, followed him in his cause." [58] Josephson thus vitiated the meaning and valor displayed by Howells in his lone crusade.

The truth is that Howells did infinitely more than write that "letter of beautiful indignation." He almost singlehandedly mounted a national and international campaign in defense of the Chicago labor organizers. And was he at fault because "no preachers or authors . . . followed him in his cause"? Equally groundless is the assertion that Howells "wrote from no depth of conviction" in his realistic novels. "When we compare the realists and social critics of Howells's type to great Europeans who had been attacking society for two centuries, we become painfully aware of their timidity," Josephson maintained.

What he ignored is that Howells ought to be compared, not with the "great Europeans," but with his American contemporaries. By such a standard, Howells stands out as a person of courage and conscience -- an example which prompted Eleanor Marx to salute him as "a brave and just man."



### A PERSONAL POSTSCRIPT

In the course of my research I went to visit the novelist's grandson, Dr. William White Howells, professor of anthropology at Harvard University, in the spring of 1978. (His father, John Mead Howells, an architect, had designed Mark Twain's home, Stormfield, in Redding, Connecticut.)

In 1909, the novelist had sent his older grandson a card on his first St. Valentine's Day. I asked Dr. Howells whether he still possessed it. He ruefully admitted that he did not.

The card read:

Dear little Child whose count of days  
Is of like number with my years,  
I have but rounded on my ways,  
And in your start my goal appears.

My hopes have been what yours shall be,  
Your joys to come in turn were mine;  
May the same love in you and me  
Keep us each other's Valentine. [59]

And on his seventy-second birthday, Howells sent this note to his grandson:

Dear Billy:

It was very sweet of you to send that birthday card, where we are walking toward the sunset together. It is a lovely sunset, but sad, and the night is beyond it. Hold fast to my hand, dear little boy, and keep me with you as long as you can. Some day, I hope not too late, you will know how I love you.

Your aff'te grandfather,  
W. D. Howells [60]

As we chatted in his office in Cambridge, Professor Howells (who was eleven years old when his grandfather died) seemed bemused by my interest in the novelist's involvement in the Haymarket affair. "He was quite a good businessman,"\* he said, "and my grandmother was a peppery little lady," adding "You know, Anarchism was not his cup of tea."

I did not think the time and place appropriate for disputation, but I promised to send him a copy of my AIMS Occasional Paper. I did observe, however, as I took leave of the professor, that his grandfather was a man of generous impulse, a believer in justice, a courageous man -- and that is why I considered it important to bring this aspect of his life out of obscurity.

\* True enough, Howells knew how to negotiate with publishers and to protect his rights as an author.



Facsimile of letter from Eleanor Marx to William Dean Howells

65 Chancery Lane.  
London, W.C.  
England.

Dear Sir,

I take the liberty of sending you the translations of  
over two of the short stories of Alexander Hellen. I  
am sure that if you will read them you will forgive my trusting  
you, & understand why I venture to do so.

People - in England at least - are beginning to appreciate  
the work of Henrik Ibsen, & I am confident that ere long the other  
great Norwegians - Hellen, Lie, Kjerfveit etc., will be equally appreciated.  
Modern Norwegian (or Swedish) literature is, as a whole, unquestionably  
the finest & the most original of our day. It has the rare quality of  
being something more than literature only for the day, & will be, some of  
us think, literature, if not for all, at least for a long time. These  
Scandinavians grapple with the real problem of our day - the  
social problem, & they are true realists. Their fidelity has prevented  
them from idealism. They are true & so can never "show" us, although  
it is easy to see that the Philistine cannot love them.

I send these translations to you for two reasons.  
First because, from my knowledge of your own work I am full  
of confidence that you will understand the work of Hellen, & that you will therefore  
help to make that work known to others. Secondly I sent

to you because ever since you had the courage to sign the appeal  
demanding a new trial for the anarchists, I have known you were not  
only a true artist, & a great writer, but that even rarer thing, a brave  
man. All you have written of late, & the way in which  
you speak of the "unnecessary suffering" of the great mass of humanity  
tell me you feel with the people, & must therefore understand how  
Hellen loves them. Hellen's work is not in a sense "didactic".  
It is perfect art that he teaches great lessons. - I think the  
making such work known is also good work. If you feel this, perhaps  
you will recommend these cheap Norwegian stories to the  
editors of Harper's.

Now one epistle was sent to the translator I have.  
I have also Ibsen's "Enemy of Society" (Camelet Series) I have just translated  
his latest play with his permission. This is about to be published  
by Fisher Unwin. - I have translated other works: - "Misericordia"  
(if you will honor me by reading my introduction to that work  
I will gladly send it to you), & Ibsen's "Historie Sola Commedia".

In the rest you may know my name. My husband & I  
lectured in the States in 1886 on Socialism - & my father  
some I am sure you know. - Karl Marx.

I trust you will excuse my writing in this  
informal way. Indeed I know you will.

Yours faithfully  
W.D. Howells Esq.

Eleanor Marx. Aveling.



(Undated)

65 Chancery Lane  
London, W.C.  
England

Dear Sir,

I take the liberty of sending you the translations of one or two of the short stories of Alexander Kielland. I am sure that if you will read them you will forgive my troubling you, and understand why I venture to do so.

People -- in England at least -- are beginning to appreciate the work of Henrik Ibsen and I am convinced that ere long the other great Norwegians -- Kielland, Lie, Elster, etc., will be equally appreciated. Modern Norwegian (and Swedish) literature is, as a whole, unquestionably the finest and the most original of our day. It has the rare quality of being something more than literature only for the day, and will be, some of us think, literature, if not for all, at least for a long time. These Scandinavians grapple with the real problem of our day -- the social problem, they are true realists. Their fidelity has preserved them from Zolaism. They are true and so can never "shock" us, although it is easy to see that the Philistine cannot love them.

I send these translations to you for two reasons. First because, from my knowledge of your own work I can feel you will understand the work of Kielland, and that you will therefore help to make that work known to others. Secondly I send [them] to you because ever since you had the courage to sign the appeal demanding a new trial for the Anarchists, I have known you were not only a true artist and a great writer, but that even rarer thing, a brave and just man. All you have written of late, and the way in which you speak of the "unnecessary suffering" of the great mass of humanity tell me you feel with the people and must therefore understand how Kielland loves them. Kielland's work is not in a sense "didactic". It is perfect art. But he teaches great lessons. I think the making such work known is also good work. If you feel this, perhaps you will recommend these strange Norwegian stories to the Editor of Harper's.

Now one egotistic word as to the translator. I have Englished Ibsen's "Enemy of Society" (Camelot Series) and have just translated his latest play with his permission. This is about to be published by Fisher Unwin. I have translated other works: "Madame Bovary" -- (if you wd honor me by reading my Introduction to that work I wd gladly send it to you), and Lissagaray's "Histoire de la Commune".

For the rest you may know my name. My husband and I lectured in the States in 1886 on Socialism -- and my father's name I am sure you know -- Karl Marx.

I trust you will excuse my writing in this informal way. Indeed I know you will.

Yours faithfully

Eleanor Marx-Aveling

W. D. Howells, Esq.



Facsimile of letter from August Spies, Michael Schwab, and Samuel Fielden  
to Governor Richard J. Oglesby

Chicago, Nov. 3. '87

Governor Rich. Oglesby  
Springfield, Ill.

Sir:

It is our wish that the truth may be known by you, and the public you represent, we desire to state that we never advocated the use of force, except in cases of self-defense. To accuse us of having attempted to overthrow law and government on May 4. '86, or at any other time, is as false as it is absurd. What ever we said or did was said and done publicly; we have never conspired or plotted to commit an unlawful act. While we attacked the present social arrangements in writing and speech, and exposed their inequities, we have never consciously broken any laws. So far from having planned the killing of anybody at the Haymarket, the only object of the meeting was to protest against the commission of murder! All our efforts have been in the direction to elevate mankind, and to remove as much as possible the causes of crime in society. Our labor was unselfish; no notion of personal gain or ambition prompted us. Thousands and thousands will bear testimony to this. We may have erred at times in our judgement - yes, we may have loved mankind, not wisely, but too well. —

Very respectfully  
A. Spies, Michael Schwab, S. Fielden

Facsimile of letter from August Spies to William M. Salter

Thursday, Nov. 3. 87

My Dear Mr. Salter:—

Captain Black has written an appeal to <sup>the</sup> governor, signed by some of us, which contains essentially the same statements. Whether under the circumstances it is wise to present the letter I enclose in this also, this you may decide. I think it would be as well if you would simply explain to the governor orally <sup>any</sup> ~~anything~~ things that he does not seem to understand. I am, as a matter of course, sorry for the poor devils who lost their lives at the Haymarket, but I am more so for the ~~lost~~ lives of the poor devils who perished on the previous day. Who cares for their wretched families? Nobody. Now, for me to express condolence ~~over~~ the killing of the policemen, and not at the same time over that of the poor fellows at Mc Cormick's or at East St. Louis, would be an act of hypocrisy.



3  
 such as I would not be guilty  
 of under any circumstances. Sufficient  
 it to say that I abhor murder  
 in every form. If I did not I  
 would never have become a  
 socialist!

Whether or not to make use  
 of the accompanying letter, I leave  
 entirely to your good judgment.  
 Thanking you for the kind interest  
 you have taken in our cause, I  
 am yours very Truly  
W. M. Salter

# APPENDIX D

Facsimile of telegram from William M. Salter to William Dean Howells  
 on eve of executions

Form No. 44.

## NIGHT MESSAGE. THE WESTERN UNION TELEGRAPH COMPANY.

This Company TRANSMITS and DELIVERS messages only on conditions limiting its liability, which have been assented to by the sender of the following message. Errors can be guarded against only by repeating a message back to the sending station for comparison, and the company will not hold itself liable for errors or delays in transmission or delivery of Unrepeated Night Messages, sent at reduced rates, beyond a sum equal to ten times the amount paid for transmission; nor in any case where the claim is not presented in writing within thirty days after sending the message.  
 This is an UNREPEATED NIGHT MESSAGE, and is delivered by request of the sender, under the conditions named above.  
 THOS. T. ECKERT, General Manager. NORVIN GREEN, President.

NUMBER	SENT BY	RECEIVED BY	CHECK
52	P. B.	B	

Received at \_\_\_\_\_ Nov 11 1887

Dated: Chicago Ills 10  
 To: W D Howells

Ling killed himself Filder  
 Schuler commuted, others to be  
 executed  
 W M Salter



## APPENDIX E

### The Haymarket Defendants

Of the eight who stood trial, Albert R. Parsons was the only native-born American. Samuel Fielden had emigrated from England, and the others were either of German birth or of German descent.

Parsons was born in Montgomery, Alabama, in 1848 and was thirty-eight years old at the time of his arrest. "My ancestry," he wrote while in jail, "goes back to the earliest settlers in this country, the first Parsons family landing on the shores of Narragansett Bay, from England, in 1632."

His mother died when he was less than two years old, his father when he was four. He was taken to an uncle in Tyler, Texas. When the Civil War broke out Parsons, who was thirteen, joined a Confederate infantry regiment, later becoming a cavalry scout. He was mustered out at the age of seventeen, after four years of service. In 1870 Parsons was elected secretary of the Texas Senate. The following year he was appointed a deputy U.S. Internal Revenue collector.

Moving to Chicago, he was employed as a compositor on the Inter-Ocean and the Daily News. He served for three years as president of the Chicago Trade and Labor Association.

His wife, Lucy Eldine Gonzales Parsons, was born in Texas about 1853 and was said to be of Black, Spanish, and Mexican ancestry. They had two children. When her husband was condemned to death, Lucy Parsons embarked on a cross-country tour to tell the true story of Haymarket. Later she went to London, where George Bernard Shaw, Oscar Wilde, and others had taken up the cause of the defendants. After the executions she wrote a book, The Life of Albert Parsons (1889), which was widely circulated. Mrs. Parsons, who was a familiar figure at many American demonstrations and protest marches, became a member of the Communist Party in 1939. Virtually blind, she died in a fire in her home in Chicago on March 7, 1942.

Samuel Fielden was born in Lancashire, England, on February 25, 1847. For a number of years he was a foreman in a family-owned textile firm. At the age of twenty-one he became a Methodist preacher. Shortly thereafter he emigrated to the U.S., arriving in New York in 1868. He worked in a hat factory in Brooklyn, New York; in a mill in Providence, Rhode Island; on a farm in Illinois; and as a day laborer on the Illinois and Michigan Canal. Fielden was thirty-nine years old at the time of the trial.

August Spies was born in Landeck, Germany, in 1855. His father, who was a forester, died when Spies was seventeen years old. Soon afterward he emigrated to the U.S. He worked as an upholsterer for seven years before becoming editor of the Arbeiter-Zeitung in Chicago. (Nina Van Zandt, the daughter of a well-to-do Chicago family, fell in love with Spies -- then thirty-two years old -- during the trial. Spies married her by proxy while in prison.)

Upon his arrival in the U.S., Adolph Fischer became an apprentice printer in his brother's printshop in Little Rock, Arkansas. At the time of his arrest, at twenty-seven, he was a compositor on the Arbeiter-Zeitung.

George Engel was born in 1836. His father, a bricklayer, died when he was eighteen months old. Arriving as a youth in Chicago, Engel found a job in a wagon factory. At the time of his arrest he and his wife had a toy shop in Chicago. "As a shopkeeper," Engel explained, "I had more time which I could devote to reading."

Michael Schwab was born in 1844. A bookbinder by trade, he later became an editorial writer for the Arbeiter-Zeitung. He was thirty-two years old at the time of his arrest and was the father of two children.

Oscar Neebe was born in 1850. He arrived in the U.S. as a youth. He was successively a factory worker, tinsmith, and salesman for a yeast company. He was the father of three children.

Louis Lingg, the youngest of the defendants, was born in Mannheim, Germany, on September 1, 1864. His father was a lumber worker. Young Lingg was apprenticed to a carpenter for thirteen years. He arrived in New York in 1885 and went directly to Chicago. He was twenty-three years old at the time of his death.

"The Neebe family," William J. Adelman has written, "always believed that the police gave him [Lingg] a cigar that morning with a dynamite cap in it, since by November 10, 1887, the public attitude was beginning to change toward the executions. His supposed suicide was used to propagandize the guilt of the other four." [61]



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Neither arts, nor letters, nor  
science, except as they tend to  
make the race better, or kinder,  
are to be regarded as serious  
interests, and they cannot do  
this except from and through  
the truth.

*W.D. Howells.*



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